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DE RUEHWD #0071/01 0571540
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 261540Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY WINDHOEK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0365
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 WINDHOEK 000071

DEPT PLS PASS TO DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/26/2019

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SUBJECT: NAMIBIA: USG AG COOPERATION - A GOOD NEWS STORY

REF: WINDHOEK 69

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR DENNISE MATHIEU for 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary
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¶1. (C) The USG has for many years collaborated with the government of Namibia (GRN) in the latter's attempt to boost its agricultural productivity, improve its plant and animal health systems, and gain access to U.S. markets. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has conducted most U.S. agricultural assistance, although the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) will soon invest in livestock and rangeland management projects in Namibia's northern communal areas. USDA is currently engaged with Namibia on several technical issues, principally its request for meat equivalence with the United States and collaboration on phytosanitary concerns, including the threat posed by the fruit fly *Bactrocera* invadens. In addition, Namibia participates in USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) capacity-building programs, such as the Cochran Fellowship program. GRN officials have expressed interest in additional collaboration with USDA. However, bureaucratic problems in the Ministry of Agriculture - which FAS/Pretoria and Embassy Windhoek will continue to monitor - could slow down our cooperation. End Summary.

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Consultations with Stakeholders
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¶2. (U) From January 26-29, FAS/Pretoria Agricultural Minister-Counselor (AgMin) and Embassy Windhoek economic officer (econoff) met with GRN officials, agriculture union representatives, members of industry, and other agriculture stakeholders. This visit sought to assess the status of USDA's activities in Namibia and to update our understanding of the agricultural situation in the country.

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Meat Equivalence - USDA Still Shepherding the Process
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¶3. (SBU) For the past several years, USDA and Namibia's Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF) have been actively engaged in a process to facilitate Namibia's meat equivalence application to USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). With equivalence status, Namibia will be able to export meat to the United States. During this recent visit, AgMin discussed the status and next steps in the equivalency process with the Permanent Secretary of Agriculture, Water and Forestry; the Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer and staff; the General Manager of the Meat Board of Namibia; and the Director and Trade Advisor of the Namibian

Agricultural Trade Forum. The benefits that access to the U.S. market could likely bring to Namibian livestock producers were also discussed in meetings with the two main farmer associations.

14. (C) Based on the discussions, Namibia clearly remains committed to addressing the single remaining outstanding issue noted by FSIS in its recent communications with Namibia: the laboratory used for the required residue tests. It is Namibia's intention to establish a separate facility within its Central Veterinary Laboratory to manage the residue tests. The tests are currently conducted in a South African laboratory. However, there has been little progress toward the construction of the Namibian facility due to delays in the awarding of contracts for its construction and for provision of the laboratory equipment.

15. (SBU) AgMin conveyed the FSIS' message that Namibia can request a meat equivalence audit at any time, even though the issue of the residue testing laboratory remains unresolved. Meat equivalence requires the evaluation of a country's inspection system which involves two steps: a document review and an on-site review. Namibia has largely passed the document review process. Now a FSIS technical team must visit the country for an on-site review to evaluate five risk areas (contamination, disease, processing, residues, and compliance and economic fraud) as well as other aspects of the inspection system including plant facilities and equipment, laboratories, training programs, and in-plant inspection operations. Should an on-site audit yield a favorable result, the rule-making process in the United States could move forward while USDA and Namibia worked together to resolve the laboratory issue. The final step of the rule making process would, however, have to await the satisfactory resolution of the residue testing laboratory.

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(Note: One possible temporary solution is for Namibia to use one of the European laboratories already recognized by the United States.) While the Permanent Secretary seemed in favor of requesting the audit as soon as possible, other participants in the process, including the Ministry's veterinary officials and the Meat Board, appeared to take a more cautious approach. AgMin also reiterated that FSIS stands ready to answer questions and provide guidance ahead of the audit, including sending a technical consultant who previously traveled to Namibia.

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Plant Health - Still a Few Bugs
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16. (SBU) Renier Burger, the Chief Plant Protection officer at MAWF, provided an update on Namibia's latest efforts to combat the threat posed by *Bactrocera invadens*, the fruit fly that is devastating horticultural production and commerce in many parts of Africa. Burger expressed gratitude for USDA/APHIS' ongoing support to his team's surveillance and mitigation efforts to slow the spread of the pest. Although they face capacity and technical constraints, Burger and his staff are diligently trying to adhere to recognized international practices to manage the domestic quarantine and cross-border trade issues. While South Africa temporarily prohibited fruit imports from Namibia in October 2008, without the work of Burger's team, the prohibition might still be in place. The Plant Protection unit eventually convinced South African authorities to allow fruit exports from southern Namibia into South Africa after demonstrating that the fly had not migrated to the southern parts of the country.

17. (C) Burger and his team are apparently under much internal pressure to cut corners in an effort to maintain Namibia's commercial trade, especially its fruit exports to South Africa. For example, the Permanent Secretary has yet to give Burger official permission to report the detection of

Bactrocera invadens within Namibia to the International Plant Protection Convention, a step that should have been automatic months ago. The Permanent Secretary's reticence to go public has left Burger the target of criticism. For example, one private sector interlocutor told AgMin that the Plant Protection unit had failed to notify farmers in time to mitigate the impact of the fruit flies on Namibian fruit exports. Nonetheless, Mr. Burger reports that he is receiving good cooperation from Namibian fruit producers and from South Africa with regard to measures that will serve to maintain biosecurity and plant health within Namibia and facilitate trade to South Africa.

18. (SBU) Namibia was able to respond quickly and effectively to this new fruit fly pest due in part to the earlier collaborative work with APHIS on surveillance and monitoring of false codling moth. Namibia is now well into the second year of data collection and the results could lead to the relaxation of mitigation measures that currently restrict the commercial viability of Namibia's table grape exports to the United States.

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Namibian Government to USDA - Help Wanted . . .
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19. (SBU) GRN officials expressed considerable interest in additional USDA technical assistance and capacity building programs, especially Food for Progress and the Cochran Fellowship. Although identified as a 2009 Food for Progress priority country, funding constraints prevented USDA from awarding Namibia a program. AgMin clarified to our interlocutors that Namibia remains eligible and that, depending on funding, one of the 2009 proposals might still be approved. Funding cutbacks in the Cochran program will prevent USDA from seeking new Fellows from Namibia in 2009. FAS/Pretoria, however, intends to support a training program for one of the 2008 Namibian Fellows who could not travel last year. The Permanent Secretary of Agriculture also asked for assistance helping develop a better agricultural statistics system. AgMin noted that USDA's National Agricultural Statistical Service does provide some assistance in the region, but at the moment funding constraints would likely prevent any near term projects.

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. . . Farmer-Based Organizations Want Help Too!
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10. (SBU) AgMin and econoff met with the two principal farmer-based organizations in Namibia: the Namibia

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Agricultural Union (NAU) which primarily represents commercial farmers, and the Namibia National Farmers Union (NNFU) which represents communal (subsistence) farmers. (Note: For more information on the differences between commercial and communal farmers see reftel. End Note). Poor rangeland management, by both communal and commercial farmers, has significantly reduced the number of livestock Namibian soil can sustain. NAU's president, Ryno Van Der Merwe, noted that, in the 1970's, commercial farmers maintained approximately 2.2 million head of cattle. Today commercial cattle number only 800,000. He acknowledged that overgrazing has contributed to today's relatively poor livestock yields as some rangeland areas can no longer sustain grasses for animals to feed on. The Millennium Challenge Account compact targets improved rangeland management to improve the productivity of grazing resources in the communal areas of Namibia as a major component of its agricultural project. The NAU and its constituent commercial farmers have put forward a plan (seeking GRN assistance) to include them in national rangeland management projects.

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Comment

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¶11. (C) Communication and coordination between the USG and GRN technical and regulatory agencies on both the meat equivalence and phytosanitary issues is functioning well. Progress on meat equivalence is perhaps slower than expected, but the delays are apparently bureaucratic in nature and not due to lack of GRN will. Within the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, there appear to be structural and leadership issues that may be affecting Namibia's response to the threat posed by the fruit fly and its prompt action on issues like meat equivalence. FAS/Pretoria and Embassy Windhoek will continue to monitor this issue in order to assess the impact, if any, on USDA programs or Namibia's adherence to international standards and protocols. As needed, USDA will continue to support the collaborative effort between APHIS and Namibia's quarantine service on both the fruit fly and codling moth issues. As appropriate, USDA will attempt to include Namibia in activities managed by USDA's SPS Regional Coordinators.

¶12. (SBU) The agriculture industry groups and associations appear to be relatively strong and active in supporting their constituents. These groups provide valuable insights into the agricultural situation in Namibia. FAS/Pretoria and Embassy Windhoek will attempt to strengthen our relationships with these groups, as they could be useful collaborators for future USDA programs as well as sources for future Cochran Fellows. End Comment.
MATHIEU